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State Dept. review completed

Immigration

The porosity of our southern border has long been considered by Mexico to be a "safety-valve" through which social and economic pressures flowing from chronic un- and underemployment are defused. To this "push" factor impelling emigration must be added the "pull" of jobs and much higher wages in the U.S. Many hundreds of thousands of Mexicans cross our border illegally every year to find employment. Over 887,000 -- including multiple repeaters -- were apprehended and returned to Mexico in FY-82. Many others remained, and apprehensions have risen markedly this year. Mexicans now constitute about half of our total illegal population, estimated variously at between 4 and 14 million. The number of two-way legal U.S.-Mexico border crossings each year now exceeds 200 million.

Current legislative efforts by Senator Simpson and Congressman Mazzoli to limit illegal immigration would impact heavily on Mexico. They would effectively limit job opportunities by penalizing employers who knowingly hire illegals, improving border enforcement, and subjecting persons here illegally after a certain date to deportation. On the other hand, the bills would offer phased legal status to millions of Mexicans here before that date, and would eventually benefit their close relatives. Possible changes in the legal migration system might also benefit Mexico.

Officially silent on the bills, the Mexican government acknowledges our sovereign right to control our borders. It has clearly indicated, however, that it much prefers the status quo, especially during these harsh economic times. It wants to be kept informed. It has told us that it does not wish to discuss the matter with us formally, because it would thus assume responsibility for taking measures to control emigration, which it is not prepared to do. We in turn would like Mexican neutrality on Simpson-Mazzoli (i.e., for the Mexican government to refrain from interfering in the U.S. domestic debate on immigration). Last December, a Mexican Senate resolution, engineered in part by some Mexican-American leaders, opposed the legislation and castigated the "unilateral" way in which it was being considered. Mexico is itself subject to strong illegal immigration pressures from Central Americans on its southern border, a problem it is addressing quite "unilaterally."

Both Simpson and Mazzoli have visited Mexico. Mexican leaders, including de la Madrid and Foreign Secretary Sepulveda (when he was Ambassador here), have been briefed on the legislation, which has passed the Senate and is awaiting House floor action.

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